Literature Circle Questions

Use these questions and the activities that follow to get more out of the experience of reading *Sounder* by William H. Armstrong.

1. Why doesn’t the boy in the story attend school?

2. Why was “Sounder” a good name for the dog?

3. What happened to the cake the boy took when he went to visit his father in jail?

4. How do you know that the boy loves and admires his father?

5. The boy enjoys when his mother tells him stories from the Bible, because the stories take away the “night loneliness.” What do you think he means by this? How do these stories help the boy?

6. Why do you think the deputy shot Sounder?

7. There are many famous children’s books about a child with a special pet dog. What are some of these other stories? How do the dogs in these other stories compare to Sounder? And why do you think this kind of story has been so popular?

8. After his father is taken away, the boy seems more concerned about his dog than his own father. Do you think he really cares more about his dog than his own father? Why does he act this way?

9. When the boy goes to visit his father in jail, his mother tells him to “act perkish, and don’t grieve your father.” Why does she say this, and what does she mean?

10. Using descriptions and details in the book, compare the life of the boy’s family with the life of the landowner’s family.

11. Interestingly, Sounder is the only one in this story with a name. Why do you think the author of this book didn’t give his characters names? And why does the dog have a name when the other characters don’t?

12. Why do you think the boy’s father told him not to visit him in jail again? What were his real reasons for saying this? Why doesn’t he explain himself to his son?

13. In what ways do you admire the boy in the story? Which character traits do you think helped him most?

14. What crime did the boy’s father commit, and why did he do it? Do you think his punishment was a just one? Explain.
15. Is the ending of this story happy, sad, or both? Did you find the conclusion satisfying? Or should the author have ended this story in a different way? Explain.

Note: These literature circle questions are keyed to Bloom’s taxonomy as follows: Knowledge: 1-3; Comprehension: 4-6; Application: 7-8; Analysis: 9-10; Synthesis: 11-12; Evaluation: 13-15.

Activities

1. What do you know about hunting with dogs? What are the qualities of a good hunting dog? Find someone to interview who has hunted with dogs, or use the Internet to research the topic. Use what you learn to create an advertisement, complete with illustrations and description for the “best hunting dog ever.”

2. During what time in history does Sounder take place? What do you know about the historical events in the United States before and after this period? Create a timeline to show where the story of Sounder takes place in a continuum of events in American history. How might this story have turned out differently if it had taken place during a different time in history?

3. What do you think the future holds for the boy in Sounder? Do you think he was able to continue his education and rise above the poverty in his family? Imagine that the boy is grown and writing his childhood memoirs. How would he describe the events in Sounder? Write a journal entry from the perspective of the boy, recounting some of these events and telling how they shaped his life.

If you do want to read more about the characters in Sounder, the story is continued in another book by William H. Armstrong called Sour Land.